United Nations A/54/PV.1

General Assembly
Fifty-fourth Session

Official Records

1st plenary meeting
Tuesday, 14 September 1999, 3 p.m.
New York

Temporary President: . . . . . Mr. Opertti (Uruguay)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Item 1 of the provisional agenda

Opening of the session by the Chairman of the delegation of Uruguay

The Temporary President *(spoke in Spanish)*: I declare open the fifty-fourth regular session of the General Assembly.

Item 2 of the provisional agenda

Minute of silent prayer or meditation

The Temporary President *(spoke in Spanish)*: Before calling on representatives to observe a minute of silent prayer or meditation in accordance with rule 62 of the rules of procedure, I propose that as we do so we also observe the International Day of Peace on this, the opening day of the fifty-fourth regular session of the General Assembly, as proclaimed by the General Assembly in its resolutions 36/67 of 30 November 1981 and 52/232 of 4 June 1998, to be devoted to commemorating and strengthening the ideals of peace both within and among all nations and peoples.

In this connection, I wish especially to welcome the children who are with us today, at the back of the General Assembly Hall. They symbolize their own future as human beings, as well as the future of their respective peoples.

I now invite representatives to stand and observe one minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

Item 126 of the provisional agenda

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/54/333)

The Temporary President *(spoke in Spanish)*: Before turning to the next item on the agenda, I should like, in keeping with the established practice, to invite the attention of the General Assembly to document A/54/333, which has been circulated in the General Assembly Hall this afternoon. It contains a letter addressed to the President of the General Assembly by the Secretary-General in which he informs the Assembly that 25 Member States are in arrears in the payment of their financial contributions to the United Nations within the terms of Article 19 of the Charter.

I should like to remind delegations that, under Article 19 of the Charter,

> "A Member of the United Nations which is in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions to the Organization shall have no vote in the General Assembly if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years."

99-85774 (E)

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of the information contained in document A/54/333?

It was so decided.

Item 3 of the provisional agenda

Credentials of representatives to the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly

(a) Appointment of the members of the Credentials Committee

The Temporary President *(spoke in Spanish)*: Rule 28 of the rules of procedure provides that the General Assembly at the beginning of each session shall appoint, on the proposal of the President, a Credentials Committee consisting of nine members.

Accordingly, it is proposed that, for the fifty-fourth session, the Credentials Committee should consist of the following Member States: Austria, Bolivia, China, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, South Africa, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago and the United States of America.

May I take it that the States I have mentioned are hereby appointed members of the Credentials Committee?

It was so decided.

Item 4 of the provisional agenda

Election of the President of the General Assembly

The Temporary President *(spoke in Spanish)*: I now invite members of the General Assembly to proceed to the election of the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session.

May I recall that, in accordance with paragraph 1 of the annex to General Assembly resolution 33/138, the President of the General Assembly at the fifty-fourth session should be elected from among the African States.

In this connection, I have been informed by the Chairman of the Group of African States that the Group has endorsed the candidacy of His Excellency Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab of Namibia for the Presidency of the General Assembly.

Taking into account the provisions of paragraph 16 of annex VI to the rules of procedure, I therefore declare His Excellency Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab of Namibia elected President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session by acclamation.

On behalf of the Government of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay, and on my own behalf, I extend most sincere congratulations to His Excellency Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Namibia, and I invite him to assume the Presidency.

I request the Chief of Protocol to escort the President to the podium.

Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab took the Chair.

Address by Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session

The President: This fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly is heralding a new millennium. Together we are setting sail in a single ship into vast and uncharted oceans. On this journey, we embark, with our experiences, our beliefs, our hopes and our fears, to craft workable solutions and institutions for the problems of our planet. As we proceed, the United Nations and its agencies stand out by their size, scope of activities, authority and as a reflection of the aspirations of humankind. The United Nations is a living Organization dedicated to the interests of "We the peoples" of the world.

My esteemed predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, Foreign Minister of Uruguay, has done a sterling job as President, and the fifty-third session of the Assembly produced outstanding results, not least of which are the preparations for this session and the "Millennium Summit". I thank him for this and wish him well in his future endeavours.

Uruguay and Namibia enjoy excellent bilateral relations. Our two countries, acting on behalf of their respective neighbours, have been promoting economic, trade and cultural relations, in the spirit of South-South cooperation. To this end, in 1995 we established the African-Latin American Initiative (ALAI). Diplomatic and business exchanges between the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have begun in earnest, and they are expected to grow in other directions.

I am, as most present here know, a graduate of the United Nations, and now I assume the office of President of the world's greatest parliament. My mind and heart are always close to the Charter of the United Nations, and I am devoted to the ideals for which it stands: a beacon for all worthy causes in the far corners of the world, especially among the poor and needy in the developing world. I wish to reiterate my strong commitment to the Charter of the United Nations and to the principles enshrined in it. I believe in a strong, democratic, transparent and caring United Nations — a United Nations that promotes people-driven virtues of brotherhood and fairness. I therefore pledge to work closely with all 185 — soon to be 188 — delegations represented in the General Assembly on the basis of the United Nations Charter and the rules of procedure of the Assembly.

I feel honoured by my unanimous endorsement in 1998 by the leaders of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to preside over this session of the Assembly, the last of the twentieth century, and I accept my election with gratitude. My election is a tribute not to me personally but to Africa and my country, Namibia. I owe this to my undaunted leader, His Excellency Mr. Sam Nujoma, President of the Republic of Namibia, whose trust and support have made this possible. I am greatly indebted to President Nujoma and thank him from the bottom of my heart.

With the cooperation and assistance of all, I cannot fail in my job. I will work hard, in close consultation with the Vice-Presidents and the Chairpersons of the Main Committees, in the execution of my duties and responsibilities.

I know that I can always count on the support of our illustrious Secretary-General, my brother, Kofi Annan. I will also need his strong shoulders to lean on when times are hard. For my part, I will give him all the help he may need in his untiring efforts on behalf of the United Nations.

Many among you have come to know me quite well. We have walked together, shared ideas and experiences and taken joint actions for change in and relating to the United Nations and beyond. You have been very helpful to me in various ways when I was the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) representative to the United Nations. Some of you have always responded without hesitation whenever I asked for help. Again, I thank you all most sincerely.

This is the first-ever General Assembly to straddle two millennia. The aspirations, hopes and expectations of the world's peoples are high as they anticipate the future. They yearn for a world that is peaceful, humane and prosperous for all. Without the United Nations, such an inclusive world, led by inspiring leaders, cannot come about. The fiftieth anniversary of our Organization in 1995 produced bright ideas and rededication towards the twenty-first century. On that occasion the world leaders collectively pledged to fulfil their promises for a new and just world order.

Let me reiterate here that the ongoing process of reforming, restructuring and democratizing the United Nations should be consistent with the end product we all want, including the review of the veto in the Security Council. At the end, we should be satisfied that the United Nations belongs to all its Member States collectively and individually.

Its ownership must be shared equitably, in a manner similar to the way in which members of an extended family share. All Member States, big and small, rich and poor, developed and developing, must have a stake in the Organization. It goes without saying that all Member States should pay their contributions on time and in full without preconditions. Without adequate resources, the United Nations cannot perform effectively. That said, the reform negotiations must continue. But, in the interest of all, any quick fix which smacks of apartheid cannot be tolerated. Instead, we should move forward together in good faith to find solutions.

The fifty-fourth session of the Assembly is momentous also because it represents a high point in the history of the anti-colonial struggle. For Africa, much of the twentieth century has been devoted to ending colonialism and to achieving liberation and independence. Africa's decolonization began in Libya in 1951. It built up and assumed urgency following Ghana's independence in 1957. Thirty-three years later, in 1990, Namibia, Africa's last colony apart from Western Sahara, became free with the assistance of the United Nations after a long and bitter struggle.

It is perhaps fortuitous, but it is a fitting coincidence of history that at the century's end both the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the President of the General Assembly are sons of Africa. The two of us represent those heroic struggles and the final triumph of the human spirit. The end of apartheid and the liberation of South Africa have brought Africa to the cutting edge

of contemporary history and international solidarity. It thus behoves me on this occasion to salute the former President of South Africa, Mr. Nelson Mandela, the current President, Mr. Thabo Mbeki, and indeed all the great South African people.

The momentum to defeat apartheid gained new impetus in this very Assembly in 1974, when racist South Africa was roundly condemned and was expelled from the General Assembly for stubbornly defying the authority of the United Nations and obstructing the demands of its victims for freedom and democracy. South Africans endured 20 more years of hardship and sacrifice until 1994, when the legitimate representatives of a new and democratic South Africa reclaimed their seat in the Assembly. It was my worthy predecessor, the then Foreign Minister of Algeria, Mr. Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who took that courageous action as President of the Assembly at its twenty-ninth session. I was witness to that unprecedented event and was emboldened by it. At this session, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika will return to the rostrum as head of State of a resurgent People's Democratic Republic of Algeria and current Chairman of the Organization of African Unity. I admire his bold leadership.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the name of President Olusegun Obasanjo and extend warm congratulations and best wishes to him on his election victory and on the restoration of democracy in Nigeria. The Special Committee against Apartheid, led by Nigeria, made constructive contributions to isolate South Africa internationally and to end apartheid in that country. Also, Nigeria, under his committed leadership, played a pivotal role in support for and solidarity with the national liberation movements and the front-line States in southern Africa.

Democracy, good governance, respect for human rights and environmental protection are common values now widely shared in Africa. The people are ready to rise up and face the new dawn.

On another front, warlords driven by blind ambition for power have destroyed Somalia. Out of the ashes of despair, Africa and the United Nations should help reconstruct Somalia and give its brave people another chance to rebuild their shattered lives.

The United Nations remains firmly committed to the early and peaceful transition of Western Sahara to self-determination.

While the latest developments concerning the question of Palestine are encouraging, the United Nations should not be sidelined, but should play its legitimate role towards the creation of an independent Palestinian State.

At the same time, I welcome the holding of the referendum in East Timor, and its results. I am, however, saddened by the bloodshed and devastation, and I call for the immediate cessation of all acts of violence to pave the way for the deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping force in East Timor.

Having expressed our human yearning for a new millennium, I will not shy away from calling upon the children of Africa's invaders and slave-traders for an honest and sincere apology, and upon the children of the victims, many of whom have been left stranded in the diaspora, for forgiveness. The horrors of slavery and destruction wrought upon Africa and its peoples cannot be forgotten. Now is the time for reconciliation and healing.

Such an act of mutual affirmation will never be truly complete unless Africa's sacred relics, icons, art works and other priceless cultural objects are returned lock, stock and barrel to their rightful owners. Today these stolen African treasures adorn public museums, libraries, art galleries and private homes in foreign lands. They must come home to assuage the pain and anger in the hearts of the succeeding generations of Africans. Now is the time for atonement, reflection and renewal to foster better human relations and rectify the ugly legacies of the past.

There are present and future challenges that face us as we enter the coming age. The first is globalization. I would place the growth, development, expansion and concentration of transnational corporations at the centre of this powerful force.

The development of global financial markets made possible by incredible technologies has helped to facilitate the formidable power and concentration of transnational corporations. We now live in a wired world in which instant communications to all corners of the globe have become an accepted way of life.

One fear exists, however. It is that the unrelenting power of transnational corporations, with interlocking financial arrangements, is overwhelming Governments, particularly in the developing world. With this in mind, African leaders recently adopted the Algiers Declaration,

in which they stated that globalization should be placed within the framework of democratically created social dynamics – globalization with a human face. Currency traders should have no chance to run roughshod over developing and industrializing countries. To prevent this, the international community should assist in promoting economic growth and prosperity that will be shared by all nations and peoples. Globalization should be about empowerment of the people, especially the youth, the future leaders. It should not cause further impoverishment or the marginalization of the poorest of the poor in the third world.

The second challenge is sustainable development and the protection of the environment. The economies of the developing world, especially in Africa, are trapped in a vicious cycle of falling commodity prices, manufacturing and mining technologies that replace labour and low levels of domestic savings and foreign direct investment. It is a known fact that growth prospects in developing countries are bleaker than they have been in years. The degradation of the environment has further compounded the situation.

Other handicaps abound in the third world, such as high unemployment, inadequate social and physical infrastructure, as well as the debilitating debt burden. Debt write-off, without imposing new hardships, is a necessary first step. Against this background, development assistance is still required and should be supplemented by private-sector initiatives. Already, there are some commendable private sector initiatives in support of United Nations social development programmes. In this connection, more discussions should be held to explore joint ventures. Last week, the United Nations co-sponsored in this Assembly Hall "the world's newest and most powerful website": NetAid.com. That presentation, through words, music and drama, showed ways and means to fight world hunger, poverty and the misery of children. I was moved and encouraged by this cooperation.

The third challenge is war. Regional wars in many parts of the world constitute a major scourge that destroys lives and whatever political, economic and social gains that have been made. The Security Council has the primary responsibility to maintain international peace and security and should speak with one voice. Its actions should be based on consensus-building and collective commitment. The Council's authority is best enhanced and its actions legitimized when it allows for more frequent open debate in which all United Nations Member States can participate.

Given the frequency with which new kinds of regional conflicts arise, both the Security Council and the General Assembly should devise practical ways and means of identifying areas of potential conflict in advance and of strengthening with resources regional mechanisms for conflict resolution in order to prevent wars and human suffering.

Better coordination between the Security Council and the General Assembly is now more necessary than ever in streamlining their relationship as they deal with these armed conflicts and humanitarian crises. Neither one of them can really be effective or successful at the expense of the other. Cooperation, rather than competition, would ensure that their efforts are complementary and provide stronger back-up for the Secretary-General. Furthermore, the role of the Economic and Social Council is indispensable both in conflict situations and in reconstruction.

The fourth challenge is that of the ever-deteriorating refugee crisis. Reports indicate that there are currently about 12 million refugees in the world, more than half of them in Africa. These neglected masses of fellow human beings have been displaced largely by devastating wars, some resulting from ethnic hatred and others from contested borders as well as natural disasters. These are women, children and men who are deprived of the basic human necessities and who end up being no one's responsibility. Their fate should be of common concern. This includes their sustenance and the restoration of their fundamental rights and dignity.

We should be asking ourselves what else the world community can do beyond providing the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) with needed, albeit usually limited, resources to lessen their suffering. I pray that there will be light for them at the end of the tunnel as we usher in the next millennium.

The fifth challenge concerns gender equality. A special session of the Assembly devoted to gender-related issues and development will be held in the year 2000. Gender equality pertains to the entire society. It affects power relationships, decision-making and governance, as well as inter-State relations. Moreover, these concerns include the family, war, peace, development, disarmament, science and technology, human rights and other public policy priorities that form intrinsic parts of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. Governments

should adopt and implement national gender policies without delay and report to the Assembly.

The sixth challenge is the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which has declared a nasty and unrelenting war on humanity. HIV/AIDS has become a major global menace that requires a common awareness and strategy and demands resources and intervention by Governments, business, intergovernmental organizations and civil society alike. It is a killer disease that respects no borders and is an enemy of all. For the wealthy in the North, money and medical treatment allow them to live with the HIV virus, or even the AIDS disease itself, for many years. For vast sections of the afflicted populations in the third world, such benefits are sadly beyond their reach, owing to prohibitive costs imposed by greedy drug manufacturers. In many such countries, notably in Africa, the situation has assumed alarming proportions. HIV/AIDS affects the economically productive and younger sections of the population. This means that sustained economic development, prosperity and progress stand to suffer immeasurably.

Prevention through education, control and treatment of HIV/AIDS is necessary but not sufficient. We must take the search for a cure into the political, social, business, community and cultural spheres. The third world needs assistance and understanding when its peoples make difficult choices between debt repayment and health and social services. On the other hand, society needs to appreciate the challenges and contributions of HIV/AIDS sufferers.

In this connection, I welcome the important decisions and resolutions adopted by the forty-ninth session of the World Health Organization Regional Committee for Africa, held recently in Windhoek, Namibia.

The world's children who are languishing today in squalid conditions created by endless armed conflicts cannot really hope to realize their highest and best dreams fully or become productive citizens and winners. These are the leaders of tomorrow. To reach their full potential as achievers, the world's children desperately need a compassionate social environment, a warm circle of family members and friends and a culturally nourishing community around them. Human security and our own future depend upon the survival of these children, particularly those who are constantly falling through the cracks in the third world.

The seventh and last challenge is the future of our children in a globalized community. Despite the advances in health care, education, science and technology, and the ratification of international conventions and protocols governing the legal rights and social welfare of children, their lives are daily at risk of being snatched away by the cruelty and indifference of adults.

In the South, our children continue to die of diseases long ago eradicated in the developed world. Moreover, both in the North and in the South, children are also victimized by drugs, crime, sexual abuse and other adult vices. Millions of the world's children continue to face a future of hunger, poverty, illiteracy and child labour. More and more of them are forced to work under difficult conditions rather than being allowed to study and play. They are easy targets of the violence and neglect that characterize life today, in both developed and developing countries.

The ever-increasing numbers of children forcibly turned into soldiers to serve in national armies and tribal, ethnic or racial gangs should outrage us all. A recent article in *The Economist* brought this out in glaring terms. The article was about children under arms around the world. While this is an old problem, its new trends are most disturbing and cannot be tolerated. The prolonged civil conflicts rely heavily on child soldiers. Worse still, child recruits have come to be preferred over adults. Why? The reasons given are insidious and immoral. Children, the soulless recruiters boast, are numerous and readily available, more malleable and impressionable, learn quickly, are small and agile, and quite simply require less food and supplies than adults. This is the horrendous fate of many of the world's children today. It demands that the United Nations show renewed commitment and redouble its efforts as the repository of humanity's conscience and of social justice in the world.

While the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child provides protection for children under 18 years of age, it allows for recruitment for military service at age 15. I commend the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for its persistent work to save children. In the same vein, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict has left no stone unturned in its efforts to make the world a better place for children. That Office and its many allies in the field must continue to blame and shame Governments for not doing enough to protect our children's lives and their future.

I have made it my business to add my voice and devotion to their laudable efforts to make the twenty-first century one of love and security for every child in the world. It is for this reason that I, during the Namibian presidency of the Security Council, presided over the Council's debate on children and armed conflict on 25 August 1999. On that occasion, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 1261 (1999) — the Council's first ever resolution on the plight of children.

I intend to do whatever I can to be helpful in this worldwide campaign during my presidency. In this context, I endorse the designation of the first decade of the next millennium as the international decade for the culture of peace and non-violence for the children of the world.

I have addressed some of the key issues of the day as I see them. I have sketched the role of the United Nations and its reform, which must be carried out in a transparent and constructive way. I have emphasized the continued importance of the United Nations Charter and the General Assembly rules of procedure. I have reiterated my strong commitment to upholding the principles and goals for which the United Nations stands. I have expressed the need for the Secretary-General and the President to work together in promoting the ideals and objectives of our Organization. I have also stressed the imperative need for the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council, as well as other vital institutions of the United Nations, to coordinate their activities.

I have recalled the completion of the decolonization process in Africa, except in Western Sahara. I have urged the United Nations to play an active role in the creation of an independent Palestinian State. I have appealed for an apology from the descendants of slave traders and forgiveness by the descendants of victims of slavery in the context of mutual affirmation. I have raised the question of globalization as an imperative for empowerment of the people. I have also called for debt write-off for developing countries and for active cooperation between the United Nations and the private sector in the interests of poverty eradication and development. I have addressed the plague of HIV/AIDS, which continues to rend the social fabric of our societies. I have reiterated the obligation of United Nations Member States to continue promoting their adherence to democracy, good governance, respect for human rights and protection of the environment.

By now, it must be clear that the plight of children, especially the phenomenon of child soldiers, is uppermost in my mind. The Security Council resolution to which I referred, *inter alia*, strongly condemns the targeting of children in situations of armed conflict, including killing and maiming, sexual violence, abduction and forced displacement, recruitment and use of children in armed conflict in violation of international law, and calls on all parties concerned to put an end to such practices.

In conclusion, I endorse the recent proposals made by the Executive Director of UNICEF and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. UNICEF called upon United Nations Member States to end the use of children as soldiers; to protect children from the effects of sanctions; to ensure that peace-building measures specifically include children; to challenge the impunity of war crimes, especially against children; and to promote early warning and preventive action for children.

For his part, the Special Representative recommended that the concept of "children as a zone of peace" be translated into practical measures on the ground to prevent or mitigate the suffering of children who are actually caught up in ongoing conflict; that neighbourhood initiatives be developed that would ultimately lead to specific arrangements and concrete actions on cross-border threats to children; that the business community should be engaged by developing voluntary codes of conduct within their own industries; that the protection and welfare of children should be placed on the international peace agenda; and that the needs of children in the aftermath of conflicts must be addressed.

Of course, I remain actively committed to the observance of the International Year for the Culture of Peace and the International Day of Peace, which we are commemorating today.

I commend the General Assembly at its fifty-third session for adopting the declaration and programme of action on a Culture of Peace.

Item 5 of the provisional agenda

Admission of new Members to the United Nations

Applications for admission (A/53/926, A/53/927, A/53/1022)

Letters from the President of the Security Council (A/53/1004, A/53/1005, A/53/1029)

Draft resolutions (A/54/L.1, A/54/L.2, A/54/L.3)

The President: In accordance with the procedure followed in the past, I should now like to invite the General Assembly to consider the positive recommendations for admission to membership in the United Nations of the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga.

The Security Council has recommended the admission of the Republic of Kiribati in document A/53/1004, the admission of the Republic of Nauru in document A/53/1005 and the admission of the Kingdom of Tonga in document A/53/1029.

The draft resolutions concerning the admission of these three new Members are contained in documents A/54/L.1, A/54/L.2 and A/54/L.3, respectively.

In addition to the countries listed in draft resolution A/54/L.1, the following countries have become sponsors: Algeria, Andorra, Austria, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Colombia, Croatia, Cyprus, Iceland, Jamaica, Kuwait, Monaco, the Netherlands, Palau, Peru, Qatar, Uruguay and Viet Nam.

We shall first consider draft resolution A/54/L.1, on the admission of the Republic of Kiribati to membership in the United Nations.

May I take it that the General Assembly accepts the recommendation of the Security Council and adopts draft resolution A/54/L.1 by acclamation?

Draft resolution A/54/L.1 was adopted) (resolution 54/1).

The President: I therefore declare the Republic of Kiribati admitted to membership in the United Nations.

I request the Chief of Protocol to escort the delegation of the Republic of Kiribati to its place in the General Assembly Hall.

The delegation of Kiribati was escorted to its place in the General Assembly Hall.

The President: We shall next consider draft resolution A/54/L.2, on the admission of the Republic of Nauru to membership in the United Nations.

In connection with draft resolution A/54/L.2, in addition to the countries listed in that document, the following countries have become sponsors: Algeria, Andorra, Austria, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Colombia, Croatia, Cyprus, Iceland, Jamaica, Kuwait, Monaco, the Netherlands, Palau, Peru, Qatar, Spain, Uruguay and Viet Nam.

May I take it that the General Assembly accepts the recommendation of the Security Council and adopts draft resolution A/54/L.2 by acclamation?

Draft resolution A/54/L.2 was adopted (resolution 54/2).

The President: I therefore declare the Republic of Nauru admitted to membership in the United Nations.

I request the Chief of Protocol to escort the delegation of the Republic of Nauru to its place in the General Assembly Hall.

The delegation of the Republic of Nauru was escorted to its place in the General Assembly Hall.

The President: We shall next consider draft resolution A/54/L.3, on the admission of the Kingdom of Tonga to membership in the United Nations.

In connection with draft resolution A/54/L.3, in addition to the countries listed in that document, the following countries have become sponsors: Algeria, Andorra, Austria, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Colombia, Croatia, Cyprus, Iceland, Jamaica, Kuwait, Monaco, the Netherlands, Palau, Peru, Qatar, Spain, Uruguay and Viet Nam.

May I take it that the General Assembly accepts the recommendation of the Security Council and adopts draft resolution A/54/L.3 by acclamation?

Draft resolution A/54/L.3 was adopted (resolution 54/3).

The President: I therefore declare the Kingdom of Tonga admitted to membership in the United Nations.

I request the Chief of Protocol to escort the delegation of the Kingdom of Tonga to its place in the General Assembly Hall.

The delegation of the Kingdom of Tonga was escorted to its place in the General Assembly Hall.

The President: It is my pleasure on this historic occasion to welcome, on behalf of the General Assembly, the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga as full Members of the United Nations. I congratulate the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga, and I congratulate the United Nations on the admission of its 186th, 187th and 188th Member States.

I am confident that these newly admitted Member States will contribute to the General Assembly and to the United Nations efforts in addressing the issues in international relations that lie ahead.

I wish the Government and the people of these new Member States peace, prosperity, happiness and every success for the future. I wish to assure the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga of the full support of the United Nations as they take their rightful place in the international community as free, independent, sovereign and peace-loving States.

I now call on the representative of Botswana, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. Legwaila (Botswana): On behalf of your brothers and sisters of the African Group, Sir, let me say how delighted and proud we are to see you in the Chair as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. Our fifty-three leaders, Presidents, Kings and Foreign Ministers, will in full measure celebrate your election during the forthcoming general debate. All I can do on this occasion is to promise you, as Chairman of the African Group in New York for this month, that our Group will not be found wanting in its endeavour to cooperate with you as you prepare our Assembly for the next millennium.

I consider it a great privilege for me, in my capacity as Chairman of the Group of African States for the month, to welcome in our midst the sisterly States of the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga. Their admission to the United Nations is a happy development. Their attainment of independence in the twilight of the twentieth century and on the eve of the twenty-first is a historic occasion, as it enables the United Nations, in its untiring campaign for universal national independence and freedom, to close the terrible chapter on colonialism and imperialism.

We welcome these three countries and pledge our support and cooperation, so that together in solidarity we can work towards the realization of the noble objectives of the United Nations. Many African nations in the United Nations also are small in size, but being small does not necessarily mean we have no influence in this Organization. Our influence lies in both our numbers and in the quality of our contribution to the activities of the United Nations.

Let me end by inviting the three new Members, on behalf of the Permanent Representative of Singapore, my friend Ambassador Mahbubani — whom I have not consulted on this — to join the Forum of Small States (FOSS) for their own security. The United Nations jungle is not always safe for us, the small ones. In FOSS they will find security, companionship and mutual admiration.

The President: I now call on the Permanent Representative of Turkey, who will make a statement on behalf of the Asian States.

Mr. Vural (Turkey): On behalf of the Group of Asian States and on my own behalf, I would like, Sir, to extend our warm congratulations on your election as President of the General Assembly. We have every reason to believe that with your able leadership and wide-ranging experience, the General Assembly will address the challenges confronting the international community in the most effective manner. Your election is also testimony to the courageous struggle and victory of Africa in taking its rightful place in the world. On this occasion, again on behalf of the Asian Group, I would like to express our heartfelt thanks and appreciation for the excellent leadership displayed by your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay.

I have the honour to warmly welcome, on behalf of the Asian Group, as well as on my own behalf and that of Turkey, the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga as the new Members of our family — the family of nations that make up the United Nations.

We extend our sincere congratulations to these three States of the Pacific region as they join the club. I am confident that the culture of diversity that symbolizes this Organization will be enriched by their contributions. Similarly, these three island States will also reap the benefits of the spirit of international cooperation and collaboration that the United Nations stands for.

It is a particularly encouraging sign that one of the main pillars on which the Organization rests is being further strengthened at a time when we are approaching a new millennium. The principle of universality has indeed been enhanced over the years since the Organization was founded. It is a source of much satisfaction that this Hall, as of today, will have designated seats for 188 Member States.

We celebrate the very timely admission of Kiribati, Nauru and Tonga as new Members prior to a very important upcoming event, namely, the special session of the General Assembly for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. This special session, along with the valuable input to be provided by our new Members, will afford us the opportunity to review policies aimed at the attainment of the shared aspiration of their economic and social development as well as the protection of the environment.

We wish the Governments and peoples of Kiribati, Nauru and Tonga peace and prosperity and every success as they take their place and assume their responsibilities as Members of the family of nations, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. I wish to assure them that they may count on the support and cooperation of the members of the Asian Group as we together pursue our common objectives to promote the ideals of peace, freedom, justice and economic and social development for all.

The President: I now call on the representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who will make a statement on behalf of the Eastern European States.

Ms. Topić (Bosnia and Herzegovina): It is my privilege and honour to address the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly on behalf of the Eastern European Group of States.

At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as the President of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. Our gratitude goes to the outgoing President, Mr. Didier Opertti.

On behalf of the Eastern European Group of States, I have the great honour to congratulate the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga on their admission to the United Nations membership. I have the pleasure to welcome the General Assembly resolutions by which we in the General Assembly admitted the three new Members to the United Nations. Today they affirm our adherence to the United Nations Charter, which states, *inter alia*:

> "We the peoples of the United Nations, determined (...) to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small (...) have resolved to combine our efforts to accomplish these aims".

Those visionary words were written in 1945. Today the United Nations family has not only grown but become wealthier with the addition of three new Members. The United Nations will enter the new millennium enlarged. We the peoples of the United Nations are thus becoming a greater force to promote peace, prosperity and justice, to foster development, to defend human rights, and to respond to all of the other global challenges of the twenty-first century.

The United Nations is expected to provide the vision and leadership in global economic and social development efforts.

With its diverse membership sharing similar experiences of transition, the Group of Eastern European States understands the need to address the social challenges raised by globalization. With the admission of three new Member States, all three of them small island developing States, we are aware that their special circumstances and characteristics will have to be duly taken into account. Considering that the fragile environment of small island developing States is particularly vulnerable to global climate change, to sea-level rise and to natural disasters, the global partnership formed at the Earth Summit — the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992 — was only a starting point, but a starting point on the basis of which countries have agreed to work together for sustainable development: development that has the capacity to meet specific needs without jeopardizing the welfare of future generations by undermining their environmental values.

Small island developing States, such as the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga, mostly project images of a dreamland. But increasingly, their azure waters, coral reefs, lagoons and rainforests are being endangered. Small island societies are faced with the challenge of striving to raise living standards for their growing populations and struggling to

survive in a complex global economic environment. In doing so, small island States have pressure placed upon their fragile ecosystems, which are among their most valuable assets.

Admission to United Nations membership of the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga will, we hope, open the path of opportunity to those countries and their peoples, so that they may enjoy the benefits and not merely the costs of globalization.

The Group of Eastern European States hopes that, in our joint efforts, all of us will be able to translate those considerations into reality in order to create a better world for all nations, large and small.

The President: I call on the representative of Paraguay, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Mr. Pappalardo (Paraguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of Paraguay, speaking on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, warmly welcomes the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session, His Excellency Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Namibia, and wishes him every success in his work. The Group reaffirms its readiness to cooperate with him in his delicate and difficult undertakings.

On behalf of the Group, my delegation wishes also to congratulate the outgoing President, His Excellency Mr. Didier Opertti, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay, on the excellent manner in which he guided the work of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. We wish him every success for the future.

It is an honour for the delegation of Paraguay to address the Assembly on behalf of the countries members of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States as we open a new session of the General Assembly, and as we approach the new millennium. This is a particularly worthy moment, as we are marking an event of great importance: the admission to the Organization of three new Members. The Group extends the warmest of welcomes to the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga, three new Member States belonging to the Asia and Pacific region, a region that will now be better represented in the United Nations system.

On behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, I state our readiness to cooperate with them in tackling the tasks that will face us in the future. It is important to reaffirm that now, with the admission of these three new Members, the Organization is growing stronger and more universal, with 188 States Members as contrasted with the original 51 at the time of the Organization's creation. Since that time, much has happened, and the world is no longer the same. It is important to underscore the need for the Organization to be able to respond effectively to the challenges posed by the new pattern of world affairs.

The President: I call on the representative of Iceland, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States.

Mr. Ingólfsson (Iceland): Allow me to congratulate you on your election, Mr. President, and to pledge to you the full support of the Group of Western European and other States.

I am honoured and privileged to take the floor on behalf of that group to congratulate and welcome as new States Members of the United Nations the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga. I would like to pay my special respects to the representatives of those States who are present here on this historic day for their respective countries.

The United Nations is a truly unique Organization of sovereign States based on the principles of mutual respect and the equality of all Members, regardless of their geographical dimensions or their population. Each new Member State brings to this forum its own characteristics, history and culture, which enrich this forum of the family of nations.

The three new Member States are all small island developing States, and their peoples have through the centuries faced great challenges in coping with the elements of nature. Today they shoulder their obligations as full Members of the United Nations to contribute to the maintenance and promotion of the principles of the Charter. We have no doubt that the new Members will participate actively and will strengthen the South Pacific perspective in the work of our Organization and at the same time will provide for a more secure and prosperous future for their peoples.

We, the members of the Group of Western European and other States, look forward to developing a

close working relationship and friendship with the representatives of the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga.

The President: I call on the representative of the United States, the host country.

Mr. Burleigh (United States of America): On behalf of the host country, I want to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly, and to wish you well as you embark on your new responsibilities. To the outgoing President, Mr. Didier Opertti, we convey a warm vote of thanks and deep appreciation for a job well done. To both of you go our thanks for your willingness to make the personal sacrifices required to meet the high demands of the presidency.

In my capacity as representative of the host country, I would like to extend warm congratulations to the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga as they become Members of the United Nations on this historic day.

Adoption by the General Assembly of resolutions admitting these States to the United Nations recognizes their sovereignty, their independence and their readiness to take their place in the community of nations.

We look forward to working with the representatives of the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga, who I trust will bring a fresh perspective to the work of this Organization. Tonga has already played a constructive role, contributing troops for regional peacekeeping in Bougainville, while Kiribati and Nauru have also been supportive of regional security and peacekeeping efforts. Their participation in the United Nations will benefit all Members as we work to advance the goals of a peaceful and prosperous international community.

Once again, on behalf of the United States as host country, I would like to convey to Presidents Tito and Harris and to King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV; to their delegations here with us today; and to all the people of Kiribati, Nauru and Tonga our most heartfelt welcome to the United Nations.

The President: I call on the representative of the Federated States of Micronesia, who will speak on behalf of the members of the South Pacific Forum.

Mr. Sigrah (Federated States of Micronesia): The delegation of the Federated States of Micronesia has the very high honour to address this body today in its capacity as the Chair of the 16 member States of the Pacific Island countries known as the South Pacific Forum. Most particularly, I speak here on behalf of the 10 Forum members that are also Member States of the United Nations: Australia; the Republic of the Fiji Islands; the Republic of the Marshall Islands; New Zealand; Palau; Papua New Guinea; Solomon Islands; Samoa; Vanuatu and my own country, the Federated States of Micronesia.

First of all, Sir, for the South Pacific Forum and for my own country, I wish to refer to the great sense of anticipation brought forth by your election to guide this fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. Your experience and leadership have made you a most appropriate choice to provide the critical leadership that will enable this Assembly to deal effectively with so many issues facing this Organization at the dawn of a new millennium. You have our congratulations and our best wishes.

At the opening of this fifty-fourth session, we are witnessing history as it unfolds. Today, three more countries have been admitted to membership in this great Organization. All three countries are members of the South Pacific Forum. Thus, along with our Pacific colleagues of the Forum, we join the other previous speakers in extending our congratulations to our sister countries — the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga — as they successfully take this long-awaited step together in joining as Members of this Organization. We rejoice and share with them the sense of joy and fulfilment which pervade this historic day.

I wish to put on record the sincere appreciation of the South Pacific Forum countries for the decisions taken by the Security Council to recommend the admission of the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga.

I would, of course, be remiss if I did not extend our utmost heartfelt appreciation to each of the many Members of this Organization that joined as co-sponsors of the three resolutions. The support of all Members of this Organization for admitting the three countries, we hope, will serve as an inspiration and encourage still others, both within our Pacific region and elsewhere, to

become Members and bring the goal of universality closer to ultimate attainment.

The admission to membership of the three Pacific Island countries in this body is a further indication of the importance that our region places in the United Nations. We join the United Nations attracted by the noble ideals that this body embraces: peace and prosperity for all. The inclusion of three additional Members from the Pacific region is no small matter in that regard. For small island States like Kiribati, Nauru and Tonga, as with most members of the South Pacific Forum, joining the United Nations is indeed a great sacrifice of scarce resources. Yet we have decided that we can no longer be mere bystanders. The smallness of our Pacific Islands and our remoteness and isolation have not insulated us from the impacts of decisions made elsewhere in the world. We must participate with the rest of the international community in the processes of finding solutions. Thus, we join this Organization driven in part by the realization of our common wish to constructively contribute in whatever little ways we can to the work of this body.

I wish once more to refer to our joy and humility at being permitted to speak on this occasion. My delegation and those of the South Pacific Forum do not lightly undertake the responsibilities of membership in this Organization. Though we are small, we earnestly hope that the voice of our small countries will earn respect in years to come.

The President: I call on the representative of Israel.

Mr. Jacob (Israel): As this is the first time my delegation takes the floor, I wish to congratulate you, Sir, on your election. We are certain that you will fulfil your obligations with distinction. We would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, for the exemplary manner in which he conducted his duties.

Israel warmly welcomes the admission of the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga to the United Nations. With the day of our own entry into the United Nations still fresh in our minds, we in Israel share in the celebration of this momentous occasion. Today's event shows that the family of nations appreciates the unique contributions these young nations will bring to the international community.

The French continental Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas has stated that one's entity becomes truly complete at the moment it engages itself with the Other. As participants in the decisions and dilemmas of the international community, these newborn States have reached this historic milestone.

Having ourselves joined the family of nations only recently, and after centuries of yearning, we in Israel feel a special solidarity with this occasion. Indeed, our ties to the nations of the Pacific are deep, solid and long-standing. We wish the peoples of the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga the best of success and prosperity, and look forward to their full and active participation in the work of the United Nations.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

Address by Mr. Teburoro Tito, President of the Republic of Kiribati

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Kiribati.

Mr. Teburoro Tito, President of Republic of Kiribati, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have great pleasure in welcoming the President of the Republic of Kiribati, His Excellency Mr. Teburoro Tito, and in inviting him to address the Assembly.

President Tito: I join others in extending congratulations and best wishes to you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency.

I bring warm greetings from the Government and the people of Kiribati, and on their behalf I thank you all most sincerely for allowing Kiribati to become the 186th Member of the United Nations. This is a historic moment for our people, a moment they have eagerly anticipated for the past 20 years. The whole nation is thrilled and joyful as Kiribati takes its *boti* in this world *maneaba*. I would like, on behalf of the people of Kiribati, to convey our heartfelt gratitude to the President and members of the Security Council for recommending our admission to the General Assembly. I would also like to express our gratitude to the General Assembly, and in particular to the Chairpersons of the five Groups — namely, the African States, the Asian States, the Eastern European States, the Latin American and Caribbean States, the Western European and other States — and to the

Ambassador of the United States, the Ambassador of the Federated States of Micronesia as Chairman of the forum, and also the Ambassador of Israel. I thank them all for their words of welcome and good wishes.

It is also my distinct pleasure to congratulate my Pacific neighbours and friends, President Rene Harris of the Republic of Nauru and Prince Ulukalala-Lavaka-Ata, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence of the Kingdom of Tonga. I am very happy that the number of Pacific countries represented at the United Nations has increased, and — who knows — we may soon have our own Pacific grouping in this great Organization.

Please also allow me, in referring to the greatness of this Organization, to pay my respects to the founding fathers of this world body for their remarkable initiative and to those who have contributed to the development and constant adaptation of the United Nations to the changes of time. Kiribati, like some other United Nations Members, having experienced what it is like to be made an innocent victim of other people's conflicts or activities, salutes and honours the noble vision and foresight of the founding fathers to create a better world for all. Needless to say, the progress the world is making today when there is less room for misunderstanding and greater scope for economic and technological achievements, speaks well for the continuing good efforts of the United Nations.

About two months ago we celebrated our twentieth anniversary of independence. The occasion commemorated two decades of nationhood since our gaining independence after 87 years of being a British protectorate. It also symbolized our sense of maturity as a nation, and we perceive this event today as a continued manifestation of that maturity.

Our admission to the United Nations today reflects our future direction as a nation ready to become more actively involved in international affairs. As a small island State, we have learned that our own responsibilities and efforts to survive and develop as a nation will always be subject to events happening in the world around us, to the extent that a small ripple within the global economy can translate into tidal waves in our small and fragile economy. In the same vein, certain policies of international financial institutions can easily frustrate many of our development aspirations. Similarly, a small disturbance in the balance of atmospheric gases as a result of other countries' activities is more than enough to cause exceptionally high tides that inundate large parts of our low-lying coral atoll islands, destroying the very source of our livelihood as a people and a nation.

Another serious concern for Kiribati relates to the different perceptions of concepts such as globalization, privatization, free trade and the like. The industrialized world argues that trade liberalization and foreign investment are the answers to the problems of the developing countries. We are repeatedly advised to introduce policies that would encourage large multinational foreign companies to invest in our respective countries so as to improve the standard of living of the people and, more importantly, to pave the way for rapid development. Regrettably, most of the international bodies we rely on for essential development assistance tend to believe that the above are the solutions for us. It is a pity that there is no analysis of the root causes of our developmental difficulties — and yet we receive abundant prescriptions for remedies that would in the long run allow foreign entities to control our economies and deprive us of our ability to decide for our countries and people. I am somewhat sceptical about the notion of a level playing field, and I am of the view that the adoption of globalization, privatization and free trade by small economies is analogous to the sharks wanting free access to the small lagoon of the small fish and promising to cooperate with the small fish and to ensure that all their problems are addressed. This is our honest perception, and we would humbly welcome correction if we have in any way misunderstood the intentions of our brothers and sisters in the developed countries.

In this connection, we would like to request this body and other international bodies to be more sensitive to the need for a more balanced approach. We believe that as the world approaches the new millennium with greater hopes for freedom, peace and prosperity, there is a greater need for a more democratic and consultative approach and for a more united and more proactive United Nations in order to further advance the common goals of development and deal with the common threats jeopardizing global peace and the global environment.

On the question of sustainable development, it is pleasing to note that in a few days this body will convene a special session to address the issues of small island developing States and to review the progress in the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action. In my view, this is a step in the right direction towards enabling the United Nations to strike the balance desired by all Member States. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to thank the international community for its

concern for the plight of the less fortunate and more vulnerable Members of the United Nations.

Obviously, these issues cannot be addressed overnight, and I have faith that with sincere commitment and cooperation this body will resolve them eventually. We eagerly look forward to taking our place, contributing to this world *maneaba* and participating in the shaping of international and global dynamics that will have an impact on our economies and people.

I also believe that the United Nations community will continue to uphold and cherish the noble principles and values foremost in the minds of those who dreamed about this great Organization and formulated the United Nations Charter more than 50 years ago. It is our sincere hope that in joining the United Nations and the international community, we will contribute, even if in a very small way, to the enhancement of the life of all peoples and the creation of a better planet for future generations. May God bless the United Nations and may He bestow love, peace and prosperity on all peoples of the world.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Kiribati for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Teburoro Tito, President of the Republic of Kiribati, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by The Honourable Rene Harris, President of the Republic of Nauru

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Nauru.

The Honourable Rene Harris, President of the Republic of Nauru, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming the President of the Republic of Nauru, His Excellency The Honourable Rene Harris, and in inviting him to address the General Assembly.

President Harris: I should like to take this opportunity to extend heartfelt congratulations to you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly this afternoon.

On behalf of the people of Nauru, I extend to the Assembly our warmest greetings of friendship — as we say in Nauru, *ekamawir omo*.

Thirty-two years ago, Nauru stood before the United Nations Trusteeship Council for the first time and called for it to recommend to the General Assembly that the Trusteeship Agreement for Nauru be terminated on 31 January 1968. In our struggle towards independence, the people of Nauru had become aware that it was only through the United Nations that their right to self-determination could be successfully heard, with application of the principles of universality and equality between nations. Nauru has since continued its beneficial relationship with this body through membership of a number of United Nations specialized agencies.

Although we are few in number, and our domain is relatively small, we have always been grateful for God's kindness to us. We affirm this through our national coat of arms, by which we declare that in all we undertake, we shall do so with God's will first.

In recent years, we have been alarmed by developments that we fear are not acts of God but acts of man. As an island nation, we are much concerned with the threat that the overfishing of fishing stocks by the larger, distant-water fishing nations presents for Nauru's sustainable economic development. The emission of greenhouse gases and the rapacious destruction of the environment, both in the name of economic development, have effected drastic changes to the world that we share. Although the economic benefits of global industrialization have largely missed Nauru, it targets first and foremost, through global climate change, the destruction of small and extremely vulnerable island States like Nauru.

In the new millennium, these changes will add an immeasurable threat to the very existence of small island countries like Nauru and to the very survival of complete island cultures such as people of Nauru.

We believe that nowhere can we make our call for international equity stronger than in the United Nations. We are convinced that there is no higher avenue to securing a safe haven on this earth than here at the United Nations. We are fortified by the knowledge that we can make no greater appeal than to the United Nations for our right to build Nauru so that present and future Nauruans can continue to proudly call Nauru their home.

We are all the more privileged today in assuming our rightful place in the family of nations. We congratulate our Pacific neighbours, the Republic of Kiribati and the Kingdom of Tonga, in joining this body

and serving to strengthen the voice of small island developing countries.

The family of Pacific countries that is the South Pacific Forum is intrinsically a peaceful one, although challenged by many developmental constraints. These constraints are due in part to nonexistent economies of scale, distance from major markets, environmental vulnerability and lack of resources. Also, as the smallest member of the United Nations, in terms of both territory and population, one of Nauru's greatest challenges is in rehabilitating the 75 per cent of the island that has been mined of its phosphate deposits, the single most significant natural resource of Nauru. With the imminent exhaustion of these deposits, Nauru would welcome the support of the international community in addressing the twin challenges of economic diversification and physical rehabilitation. Furthermore, Nauru cannot but voice its increasing awareness of threats to the long-standing peace it has enjoyed in the Pacific region. Fundamentally, any threat to peaceful coexistence among peoples demands decisive if sensitive action by the international community.

Indeed, Nauru cannot but notice that in today's global economy the challenges to small island countries encompass economic, political and, increasingly, security issues. It is all the more crucial that the principle of equality between all nations, large and small, developed and developing, be an integral factor in shaping a more effective and egalitarian United Nations for the new millennium. The United Nations therefore faces unique challenges for which it should develop innovative solutions, fundamentally shaped by common interests in peace and progress for all mankind.

The founding father and first President of Nauru, Sir Hammer DeRoburt, said in concluding his address to the Trusteeship Council in 1967, in our unique Nauruan language,

(spoke in Nauruan: English text furnished by the delegation)

> "Thank you for helping Nauru, and we wish your organization good fortune and success in the work it is doing and it is seeking for the good of the world."

(spoke in English)

For 31 years since, we the people of Nauru have enjoyed independence under the sovereignty of the Republic of Nauru. We the people of Nauru now stand ready to play our part in the family of the United Nations. Thank you, and God bless the United Nations.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Nauru for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Rene Harris, President of the Republic of Nauru, was escorted from the rostrum.

The President: I now have the pleasure to invite the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence of the Kingdom of Tonga, His Royal Highness Prince Ulukalala-Lavaka-Ata, to address the Assembly.

Prince Ulukalala-Lavaka-Ata (Tonga): Congratulations on your election, Mr. President. Let me assure you of Tonga's support in the future.

May I also take this opportunity to thank our sponsoring countries.

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Kingdom of Tonga and, in so doing, to convey our appreciation for the statements made by Ambassador Legwaila, on behalf of the Group of African States; Ambassador Vural, on behalf of the Group of Asian States; Ambassador Topić, on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States; Mr. Pappalardo, on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States; Ambassador Ingólfsson, on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States; Ambassador Burleigh, on behalf of the host country; Ambassador Sigrah, on behalf of the South Pacific Forum; and Ambassador Jacob, on behalf of Israel, all welcoming Tonga on its admission to membership in the United Nations.

I should also like to express the Kingdom's gratitude to the General Assembly for favourably considering our application to take our place here. It is of added, special significance that we embark upon this journey together with two of our Pacific neighbours, Nauru and Kiribati.

We are the last remaining Kingdom in the Pacific region, with a small but resourceful population. Our journey is similar to those of our Pacific neighbours — many years ago our forefathers traversed the mighty expanse of the Pacific Ocean and established settlements on the scattered islands of the Pacific. These endeavours culminated for us on 4 June 1970, when Tonga re-entered

the comity of nations. On that day we became a member of the Commonwealth of Nations and acceded to a number of treaties and conventions that were concluded under several formal arrangements of yesteryear. Not long afterwards, we became a signatory to the first Lomé Convention, concluded between certain African, Caribbean and Pacific States and the European Union. Indeed, we were also a signatory to three other Lomé Conventions and, together with our African, Caribbean and Pacific partners, are now engaged in negotiations with the European Union on a possible successor arrangement.

Since 1970 we have been a full and active member in almost all of the specialized agencies of the United Nations, which reflects our focus on sectoral prioritizing. However, the time has come for us to take a more proactive part and play a fuller role at the highest level, and in so doing broaden our scope and outlook on the international scene. The Kingdom therefore celebrates its admission as the newest Member of the United Nations.

Our membership of the United Nations enables us to strengthen the formal relations that exist between Tonga and certain Members of the Organization, while allowing us the opportunity to forge, develop and foster new relationships with other Members of the United Nations community. We understand that the nature of our membership entails obligations and responsibilities. We are committed to fulfilling our obligations and responsibilities, but we also recognize the inherent benefits of our membership. In this regard, we seek, then, the friendship of the Member States of the United Nations and pledge respect for the rule of law.

From a regional perspective, we maintain a passion for solidarity with our Pacific neighbours on issues of mutual concern, in particular those concerning the long-term preservation and protection of our environment, the thoughtful management and conservation of our shared ocean resources and the sustainable economic development of our islands.

As a small island country, we recognize that developing a strong economy on a sustainable basis will not come easily because of our acute vulnerability, which has been fashioned as much by nature as by the vagaries of market forces far beyond our shores.

We have benefited in our economic development endeavours due to assistance from the international community through bilateral and multilateral programmes, as well as from the resource transfers of our nationals living abroad. These have been underpinned by a finely tuned set of economic policies that change, as they must, in the face of a new global economic equation, and also because of domestic realities.

Nonetheless, history has taught us the value of our human resources development and the value of the preservation of our culture and traditions, all of which are predicated on respect within our society. These values have coexisted side by side with the policies of economic development, thus enabling our small nation to remain vibrant and independent. We know we are not alone and that these are experiences shared in our region. It is fitting, therefore, that the issues that have an impact upon small island developing States and on the lives of our peoples should be addressed at the General Assembly's special session on small island developing States. We are committed to this process and recognize that the understanding and cooperation of all Members is crucial to reaching meaningful outcomes to meet the aspirations of our peoples.

In our application for admission to the United Nations, I, on behalf of the Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, undertook to accept the principles set forth in the Charter of the United Nations and to state our firm commitment to discharging the duties and obligations therein. Today, I reaffirm those commitments to the United Nations.

Finally, I would like to commend the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his leadership and ongoing efforts to strengthen and revitalize the Organization to better face the challenges of the new era. We wish him well and look forward to contributing to the work he has already begun.

I am grateful for your patience this afternoon, Mr. President, and wish Member States well for the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly and for the forthcoming special session on small island developing States.

The President: I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence of the Kingdom of Tonga for his statement.

I should like to announce that the flags of the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga will be raised at a ceremony that will take place in front of the delegates' entrance immediately following the adjournment of the second plenary meeting this afternoon.

The meeting rose at 5.20 p.m.